United Nations ECE/CES/2018/13

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
29 March 2018

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians
Sixty-sixth plenary session
Geneva, 18–20 June 2018
Item 5 of the provisional agenda
Collaboration with United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Europe on geospatial data and statistics

Improving collaboration between United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Managements Europe on geospatial data and statistics

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

This document presents a joint proposal for deepening the collaboration between the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the European group of the United Nations initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM: Europe). This proposal was approved by the UNECE Executive Committee in December 2018, and responded to a decision of the 67th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (E/ECE/1485) in April 2017:

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe,

Decides to request UNECE to engage with the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM: Europe), within existing resources, to gain a better understanding of how geospatial information can complement and support existing UNECE activities, particularly in the area of reviewing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, and to present a detailed proposal for collaboration between the two bodies, taking into account the decision of the Conference of European Statisticians of April 2016 to support professional forums for statistical and geospatial experts to share good practices and learn from one another (ECE/CES/91) and a forthcoming decision on the nature and scope of this collaboration by the UNGGIM: Europe Plenary Session, to be held in June 2017, for the consideration of the UNECE Executive Committee before December 2017.

GE.18-04975(E)

1804975

Please recycle

I. Background

1. In 2011, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM), to provide a forum for coordination and dialogue between member States on topics related to geospatial information. Under this Committee, five regional geospatial expert groups were established, including UN-GGIM: Europe, which was created in autumn 2014.

2. In July 2016, ECOSOC adopted a resolution on strengthening institutional arrangements on geospatial information management (E/2016/L.28). The Resolution "requests that the regional commissions provide relevant support, upon request and as appropriate, to the work of the regional bodies of the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management, and that the outcomes and benefits of the activities of those bodies be equally disseminated to all Member States in each region". Support and collaboration arrangements have already been established between regional commissions and regional UN-GGIM bodies in Africa and Latin America, and are being established in the Asia-Pacific region.

3. UN-GGIM: Europe and UNECE have been gradually deepening collaboration, mainly through participation in each other's events, and the organisation of a joint Workshop on the Integration of Geospatial and Statistical Standards (6-8 October 2017, Stockholm, Sweden).

4. In June 2017 the UNECE Conference of European Statisticians "supported greater collaboration between UNECE and UN-GGIM: Europe, and the development of a concrete proposal for joint work, for a decision by the UNECE Executive Committee".

5. In August 2017, at its seventh session in New York, the UN-GGIM Committee took two decisions encouraging the UN-GGIM regional bodies to work closer with the UN Regional Commissions:

- In Decision 7/101(e), the UN-GGIM Committee "encouraged the regional committees of UN-GGIM to continue their outreach to the UN Regional Commissions, and determine possible mechanisms for collaboration, and report progress back to the Committee at its next session";
- In Decision 7/107 (c), the Committee also "urged the regional committees to continue to reach out and engage with their respective regional statistical counterparts to further strengthen partnerships".

II. Strategic areas for collaboration

6. UN-GGIM: Europe and the UNECE Secretariat recognise the mutual benefits of working together. In particular, benefits are expected in terms of improving outreach and raising awareness of the respective work programmes, as well as strengthening capacity-building activities and learning from each other.

7. UN-GGIM: Europe and the UNECE Secretariat have identified the following strategic areas as priorities for future collaboration, which are in line with the latest directions of work from the UN-GGIM Committee at global level:

- **Geospatial information for sustainable development**: In March 2017, the United Nations Statistical Commission agreed a framework of 232 indicators for the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Most of these Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators are broken down by

multiple dimensions, including geospatial ones such as regional or urban/rural classifications. To provide the necessary data, combinations of statistical and geospatial information are required. Combining geospatial and statistical expertise is crucial for measuring and monitoring SDGs, and tracking annual progress. In the UNECE region, UN-GGIM: Europe and the Conference of European Statisticians are ideally placed to ensure that the statistical and geospatial communities work together to meet this requirement.

- **Building networks and promoting communication:** In August 2017, the UN-GGIM Committee welcomed work to develop an overarching framework for national institutional arrangements in geospatial information management, including identifying good practices and promoting their application across member States. It also requested the development of "mechanisms for member States to build capacity to address the legal and policy matters that have an impact on the collection, dissemination and application of geospatial information". The UNECE secretariat in close collaboration with UN-GGIM: Europe can provide such a mechanism by facilitating the development of multi-disciplinary networks and promoting greater communication between statistical, geospatial and other relevant communities within the UNECE region.

- **Integration of geospatial, statistical and other information, including capacity building**: In early June 2017, the UN-GGIM: Europe plenary session agreed to open its activities for the participation of all UNECE member States. The Conference of European Statisticians welcomed this move, later the same month, noting that "capacity building activities will be needed to support this wider participation". In August 2017, the UN-GGIM Committee "urged the regional committees to continue to reach out and engage with their respective regional statistical counterparts to further strengthen partnerships" and highlighted the importance of capacity building in the form of advocacy, regional and sub-regional workshops.

- **Involvement of other UNECE work programmes**: Other UNECE work programmes, for example housing and land management, environment, transport and forestry, also have geospatial components in some of their activities. Discussions would be held between representatives of UN-GGIM: Europe and the relevant UNECE work programmes to identify potential areas for further collaboration. This would include exploring how UNECE can help UN-GGIM: Europe to extend its outreach to these and other sectors.

  As an example, several members of the UNECE Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA) are involved in the activities of the UN-GGIM (global) Expert Group on Land Administration and Management. Some WPLA members were also present at the seventh session of the global UN-GGIM group in August 2017 in New York. The WPLA is therefore well placed to work with UN-GGIM: Europe on issues of shared interest, such as strategies to develop better land management systems by improving cadastral and land registry systems based on geospatial data. Benchmarking of land management systems is another possible area for future collaboration.

III. Concrete proposals for collaboration activities in 2018-2020

8. The UNECE Secretariat and the Executive Committee of UN-GGIM: Europe have agreed to pursue the following collaboration activities in the period 2018-2020:

- Geospatial information for sustainable development:
  - Involve representatives of UN-GGIM: Europe in the work of the CES Steering Group on statistics for SDGs.
  - Identify activities where the CES activities could contribute to the UN-GGIM: Europe work plan related to SDGs.
- Building networks and promoting communication:
  - Promote dialogue between national bodies responsible for geospatial and statistical information, including earth observations. A joint high-level seminar will bring together heads of national statistical, mapping and geospatial agencies to explore areas for building collaboration at the strategic level, and to share good practices.
  - Reduce obstacles to greater data sharing and more open data access, taking account of privacy and confidentiality requirements.
  - Develop wider communication networks based on the existing ones established by the geospatial and statistical communities.
- Integration of geospatial, statistical and other information:
  - UN-GGIM: Europe currently has activities on the integration of geospatial and statistical information, whilst a project under the Conference of European Statisticians has been investigating how to more effectively link these sources with administrative registers, private data holdings, so-called "Big Data", and other sources for more efficient production of all types of official statistics. Activities should be more closely coordinated and aligned, also taking into account other related global and regional initiatives.
  - Supporting the 2020 round of population and housing censuses: Population and housing censuses are traditionally seen as statistical exercises, but they use and produce a lot of geospatial information. Determining the precise location of residences and work places is essential for local and national infrastructure and service delivery planning. UN-GGIM: Europe experts will be invited to the regular UNECE meetings on population censuses. Future work could include the elaboration of guidelines for implementing geocoding in censuses
  - Linking geospatial data to all phases of statistical production, particularly the presentation and dissemination of statistics.
- Capacity building:
  - Following the joint UNECE / UN-GGIM: Europe Workshop on the Integration of Geospatial and Statistical Standards (October 2017, in Stockholm, Sweden) the scope for further joint events in specific technical areas will be considered. This will take into account national priorities and capacity building requirements of both bodies, particularly in the context of SDGs, and will leverage existing UNECE capacity building tools and platforms. The possibility of joint development of recommendations and manuals will be considered, as well as activities to develop the concept of geospatial core data across the statistical and geospatial communities.
- Involvement of other UNECE work programmes:

- Establish an internal UNECE network on geospatial information management, with representatives from all interested work programmes. This network would engage with the UN-GGIM: Europe Executive Committee to identify activities that would bring mutual benefits.

- Cross-representation in the activities of the other body:
  - Establish formal mechanisms for involvement in the activities of the other body, to improve understanding and to learn from each other. For example, this would include granting UN-GGIM: Europe observer status in the Conference of European Statisticians, and UNECE observer status in UN-GGIM: Europe meetings. The possibility of organising a joint meeting of the UN-GGIM: Europe Executive Committee and the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians would be explored.

- Reporting on progress / work accomplished:
  - The UNECE Secretariat and UN-GGIM: Europe will prepare annual reports on collaboration activities, to be presented to the annual plenary sessions of UN-GGIM: Europe and the Conference of European Statisticians. Those bodies will be invited to comment on the activities reported, and to propose new ones.

9. The above activities will be implemented through:

- Establishing reciprocity and participating in each other's regional meetings;
- Organising joint events on topics of mutual interest;
- Collaborating in producing outputs on relevant topics;
- Collaborating on exchange of good practices;
- Developing joint capacity building activities in member states;
- Developing the concept of core data for geospatial and statistical communities;
- Promoting easier access to data;
- Developing wider communication networks.

IV. Implementing the work programme

10. The proposed activities form a work plan, the implementation of which has already started. The main activities that have taken place, and are planned, are as follows:

(a) The UNECE hosted a meeting of the UN-GGIM: Europe Executive Committee in November 2017, where representatives of the UNECE statistics, environment, housing and land management work programmes reported on their work and stressed the need for closer collaboration;

(b) A second meeting of this Executive Committee was hosted by UNECE in Geneva on 13 April 2018, back-to back with a High-Level Seminar on Strategic Partnerships in Official Statistics, which explored ways to strengthen collaboration between national statistical and geospatial organisations;

(c) A joint UNECE / UN-GGIM: Europe expert group meeting on integrating statistical and geospatial standards was held in Stockholm at the end of 2017;

(d) A joint Eurostat / UN-GGIM: Europe / UNECE meeting on the integration of statistical and geospatial information was held in Luxembourg on 17-18 April 2018;

(e) For the first time, all UNECE member States were invited to attend the annual plenary session of UN-GGIM: Europe (Brussels, 6-7 June 2018);

(f) A special session on the use of geospatial and satellite information to support the data requirements for SDGs, will be organised at the next meeting of the SPECA Working Group on Statistics (Shymkent, Kazakhstan, October 2018);

(g) The use of geospatial information is important in the context of meeting information needs relating to SDGs, particularly given growing demands for geographical disaggregation of data within countries. This was discussed at the UNECE Second Expert Meeting on Statistics for SDGs, and related side-events (Geneva, 16-20 April 2018).